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(71)(72) Applicants and Inventors: VIJG, Jan [NL/US]; 16 High Rock Terrace, Newton, MA 02167 (US). LI, Daizong [CN/US]; 25 Queensbury Street, Boston, MA 02218 (US).

(74) Agent: ALLSOP, John, Rowland; MacLeod & Co., 10 London End, Beaconsfield, Bucks HP9 2JH (GB).

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(54) Title: METHOD OF AND APPARATUS FOR DIAGNOSTIC DNA TESTING

(57) Abstract

An assay for detecting mutations in genes by a two-step multiplex polymerase chain reaction amplification followed by preferably two-dimensional electrophoretic separation of the fragments on the basis of both size and base pair sequence.

METHOD OF AND APPARATUS FOR DIAGNOSTIC DNA TESTING

The present invention relates to the diagnostic testing of DNA using polymerase

chain reaction (PCR) amplification followed by electrophoretic separation of the resulting

fragments to detect possible gene variants of mutational defects and the like; being more

particularly directed to new and improved multiplex PCR techniques in combination with

5   preferably two-dimensional electrophoretic separation in denaturing gradient gels.

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This invention pertains particularly to tests for the presence of DNA mutations in patients with inherited diseases, including birth defects (e.g. cystic fibrosis) and genetic predispositions to adult chronic diseases (e.g., cancer). More specifically, the invention relates to the quick preparation, by a novel two-step polymerase chain reaction (PCR)

5 amplification, of gene fragments and their subsequent efficient and accurate examination for mutations.

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

10   Genes with mutational defects (gene variants or alleles) can be identified by DNA diagnostic testing. Gene variants can be transmitted from parents to children. Some gene variants have a very strong effect and are, by themselves, capable of causing disease. Examples are many mutational variants of the cystic fibrosis transmembrane conductance regulator (CFTR) gene that cause cystic fibrosis. Other gene variants act in combination

15 with gene variants from other loci. Examples include many of the common (polygenic) diseases, like heart disease and cancer. It is possible to test for gene defects in an early stage; that is, in cells from the embryo (pre-natal testing), but also at a much later stage in young, adult or old individuals.

By DNA diagnostic testing, information is obtained about a disease, sometimes

20 before it has become manifest. This greatly facilitates management of the disease, e.g., prevention, treatment. For example, it is possible to test for the presence of particular gene variants in cancers or infectious disease agents in order to predict, e.g., the course

of the disease, response to therapy. It is also possible to test individuals for carrying a

particular gene variant, which they would not like to see transmitted to their offspring

(carrier testing). Finally, it is possible to test individuals at any time (from pre-natal to late

age) for inherited gene-encoded predispositions to disease. An example from one end of

5   the spectrum is cystic fibrosis, for which pre-natal testing and carrier screening has

already become relatively common. The other end of the spectrum involves late-onset

diseases, like cancers and neurodegenerative diseases.

DNA diagnostic testing involves an analysis of the sequence integrity of individual

genes. At present, this is costly since accurate testing requires sequencing, or decoding,

10 of the gene, which is labour intensive. Thusfar no cost-effective universally applicable

standardized system for DNA diagnostics has become available (for a review, see Cotton,

1993, Current methods of mutation detection, Mutat. Res. 285:125-144). In order to be

cost-effective and widely accepted a DNA diagnostic system must be accurate (more than

95%), have a high throughput, and not be labour intensive.

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GENERAL BACKGROUND OF ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

It is initially in order briefly to review the general techniques involved in PCR

amplification and in electrophoretic separation of fragments, and where the art has

20 applied and is currently applying the same.

A sample of cells, such as derived from blood, is first chemically and physically

treated to extract DNA strands carrying genes that occupy only about two percent of the

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total DNA material in a cell genome, with the remainder of DNA material cluttering up the background. While each cell has two copies of each gene and such can be identified by building blocks or basepairs identified by sequences of letters A, C, G and T as a letter code, they constitute such a small part of the long DNA strands that they must be

5   amplified by making many copies of the same to permit their inspection. This is effected by heat-separating or denaturing of the DNA strand pairs, mixing with appropriate primers to bind or anneal to the beginning and the end of the gene fragments (e.g., gene exons or coding regions) to be investigated, later more fully discussed, and adding sufficient building blocks to generate copies of the gene exons. The successive repeating of this

10 cycle of steps effects a cumulative copying of the exons to produce a purified and amplified quantity - a process generally referred to as the before mentioned polymerase chain reaction or PCR amplification - and more fully reviewed, for example, in Molecular Pathology, Hein and Silverman, Carolina Academic Press, 1994, Chapter 2, Molecular Techniques and Their Automation in the Clinical Laboratory, pages 5-31 (Winn-Deen).

15 At this stage, it is then in order to inspect or analyze the gene exons to determine if there are mutations from normalcy. This is generally done by electrophoretically separating the DNA purified fragments, preferably on the basis both of size and base-pair sequence, as more fully described by co-applicant Vijg and A.G. Uitterlinden in Two-dimensional DNA typing: A Parallel Approach to Genome Analysis, Ellis Horwood, 1994,

20 particularly at pages 33-40.

Electrophoresis has been used not only for DNA fragment separation but also for separating other substances than genes, such as, for example, for protein analysis, as

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described in Electrophoresis 1993, 14, 1091-1198. Machines are provided for one-dimensional DNA separation by electrophoresis with fluorescent dye labeling, such as the ABI Prism 377 DNA sequencer of Perkin Elmer; and for two-dimensional DNA typing, as described by co-applicant Vijg and E. Mullaart et al. in Nature, 365, 30 September, 1993,

5 Parallel genome analysis by two-dimensional DNA typing, pages 469-471, describing apparatus of Ingeny B.V. of The Netherlands. The first dimension (say horizontal) application of the electric field to an appropriate gel matrix (later discussed) into which the purified DNA fragments have been introduced, causes separation of the fragments by size, larger particles moving slower than smaller particles. By applying the electric field

10 in an orthogonal direction (vertically) with a chemical gradient as of successively more concentrated urea/formamide disposed in the gel, or a temperature gradient established therealong, the DNA fragments will migrate (this time vertically) until they melt and are locked in position in the gel matrix at particular vertical sequence-determined locations. To prevent melting of the entire DNA fragments, the latter can be attached (before the

15 electrophoresis process) to a number of only G's and C's, which are more resistant to melting than A's and T's. This so-called GC-clamping, effectively locks each fragment in position which is determined entirely by the sequence of the exon-part of the fragments. Is this sequence changed at only one position, for example, by the substitution of an AT couple for a GC couple, it will melt later or earlier and hence become locked in a different

20 vertical position than the normal reference fragment.

Such two-dimensional gene scanning (TDGS) has promise for becoming a cost-effective and widely accepted DNA diagnostic system. In this system, as above described,

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a large number of DNA fragments obtained through polymerase chain reaction (PCR) amplification from a given DNA sample are electrophoretically separated on the basis of both size and basepair sequence. This system is highly accurate (i.e., 99%), since the second dimension separation is based on denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis

5   (DGGE). Indeed, DGGE is the only system with such high accuracy (Sheffield et al., 1993, The sensitivity of single-strand conformation polymorphism analysis for the detection of single base substitutions, Genomics 16, 325-332; Grompe, 1993, The rapid detection of unknown mutations in nucleic acids, Nature Genet. 5, 111-117; Guldberg et al.,1993, Molecular analysis of phenylketonuria in Denmark: 99% of the mutations

10   detected by denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis, Genomics 17, 141-146). Automatic instrumentation for TDGS is partly available and partly under development. TDGS allows the detection of all possible mutations in DNA fragments obtained from one or more genes simultaneously at a high throughput and with a minimum of manual interference.

One major hindrance to the widespread application of TDGS in DNA diagnostics

15   is the difficulty of amplifying many fragments simultaneously in the same reaction tube by PCR (multiplex PCR). In fact, it is often not even possible to find PCR primer sites that amplify the relevant gene fragments and simultaneously fulfil requirements for both PCR and denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis, i.e., optimal PCR reactions and optimal melting behaviour of the amplified fragments. The current procedure begins with

20   amplifying regions of the target DNA, usually the protein-coding regions (exons) of a gene, by PCR. These amplification reactions are conducted separately, e.g., if 27 exons in a gene are being analyzed, then 27 separate PCR reactions must be conducted. In

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practice, it is usually possible to conduct a few PCR reactions together in one tube (e.g.,

Edwards and Gibbs, 1994, Multiplex PCR: advantages, development, and application,

PCR Methods and Applications 3, S65-S75).

Clearly, with a large number of individuals to be tested and when more than one

5   gene is tested simultaneously in the same TDGS test, the total number of pipetting steps

and individual reactions to be carried out can become very high. This increases the labour

intensity of the test, but makes it also more complicated with a higher chance of human

error. Indeed, in view of this complexity, even complete lab automation where all pipetting

steps are done automatically will not solve this problem.

10   The problem of not being able to PCR-amplify multiple fragments simultaneously

under identical reaction conditions in the same tube is an important technical hurdle for

TDGS to meet criteria for clinical testing, i.e., laboratory user-friendliness. To reduce the

number of PCR reactions via multiplexing, i.e., conducting several PCR amplifications in

one reaction by employing multiple sets of primers, is a non-trivial development.

15   Current approaches for multiplexing are sometimes as simple as combining a few

sets of primers for which reaction conditions have been determined separately. However,

in most cases multiplex PCRs must be developed with careful consideration for the

regions to be amplified, the relative sizes of the fragments, the dynamics of the primers,

and the optimization of PCR experimental conditions to accommodate multiple fragments.

20   A key problem is the positioning of the primers. For gene diagnosis one generally

aims at amplifying the exon sequences, splice sites and regulatory regions. Primers for

exon-amplifying PCR reactions are ideally placed in intronic sequences adjacent to the

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exons. This provides some margin for adjustment of fragment length or amplification quality as well as information about mutations affecting splice sites. These are the first limits to primer choice.

Then, primers should be positioned so that non-specific amplification at other sites 5   than the target sequences does not occur. Indeed, the human genome is 3×10^9 basepairs long, which provides ample opportunity for fortuitous sequence homology between the target and other non-target sequences. This problem is not typical for multiplexing, but can also occur when one wishes to amplify only one fragment at a time. This is the second limitation to primer choice.

10 For multiplexing, primers should be selected so that their predicted hybridization kinetics are similar to those of other primers in the multiplex reaction. This is a third limitation to primer choice. These limitations to primer choice, with total genomic DNA as template, are the reasons why multiplex groups are usually small (typically less than 5 fragments).

15 For optimal separation in TDGS there is a fourth formidable limit to primer choice. TDGS requires DNA fragments of 100-600 bp on average. One of the two primers should be coupled to a GC-rich fragment to provide for a GC-clamp as highest melting domain in the fragment to be generated by PCR. This is essential to guarantee the highest sensitivity to detect mutations in the second (denaturing gradient) dimension gel (Myers 20 et al., 1985, Nearly all single base substitutions in DNA fragments joined to a GC-clamp can be detected by denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis, Nucl. Acids Res. 13, 3131-3145; Myers, et al., 1987, Detection and localization of single base changes by denaturing

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gradient gel electrophoresis, Meth. Enzymol., 155, 501-527). Then, primers should be

positioned in such a way that the target fragment comprises only one single domain, that

melts earlier (at lower urea/formamide concentration or temperature) than the GC-clamp

attached to it. It turned out that optimal PCR conditions for both PCR (let alone

5 multiplexing) and optimal melting profiles are difficult, if not impossible, to realize (e.g.,

compare the RB DGGE design by Blanquet et al., 1993, Identification of germline

mutations in the RB1 gene by denaturant gradient gel electrophoresis and polymerase

chain reaction direct sequencing, Hum. Molec. Genet. 2, 975-979, with our present

design).

10   The present invention involves a combination of so-called long-PCR with short-

PCR. Recently, PCR amplification methods were developed allowing the amplification of

large fragments (up to 40 kb) from the genomic DNA. We have taken advantage of this

development by using long-PCR to first amplify all the coding regions of the target

gene(s) in the smallest number of fragments possible. Using these long amplicons as

15 template we then PCR-amplify the small fragments, required for the TDGS, in a multiplex

format. In this way the target sequence is first amplified away from the contaminating

genomic DNA, which allows to obtain the small PCR fragments under identical conditions

from this pre-purified template.

Using the above procedure, primer sets selected only on the basis of optimal

20 melting behaviour of the PCR amplicons, also exhibited optimal behaviour in the PCR and

even allowed extensive multiplexing. In part this phenomenon can be ascribed to the pre-

purification by the long-PCR. Indeed, the long-PCR greatly increases the amounts of

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target sequence relative to other genomic DNA sequences, thereby greatly decreasing

complexity of the reaction and increasing its specificity.

Although the above described phenomenon can be explained by the reduction of

complexity through the preparation of a purified template, an exact explanation can not

5   be given. Indeed, the sheer magnitude of the effect is surprising and necessitates a

reevaluation of the factors involved in PCR optimization. One thing is clear, however. The

present invention alone enables one to design and perform an efficient TDGS test,

because primers can now be selected on the basis of melting profile alone and

multiplexing is greatly facilitated.

10   The invention is also generally applicable. Indeed, selection of primers in every

PCR-based diagnostic reaction is an important issue and many potential priming sites turn

out to give poor results. Multiplexing then generates additional problems, which is the

reason that it is not widely used. The long-PCR/short-PCR two-step amplification system

offers an immediate and simple solution to this problem.

15

OBJECTS OF INVENTION

An object of the invention, accordingly, is to provide a new and improved method

and apparatus for diagnostic DNA testing that obviate the above described difficulties.

20   A further object is to provide for novel detection of mutations in genes by a two-

step multiplex polymerase chain reaction amplification using long and short multiplex PCR

followed by two-dimensional electrophoretic separation of the fragments on the basis of

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both size and basepair sequence.

Other objects will be explained hereinafter and pointed out in connection with the appended claims.

5   BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

The invention will now be described in connection with the accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. 1 illustrates the sequence of process steps for performing the invention.

10   FIG. 2 shows the melting curves for RB exon 12 with and without the GC-clamp (i.e. retinal blastoma gene).

FIG. 3 shows maps of the tumor suppressor gene RB indicating the positions of the PCR primers for the long- and short-PCR reactions.

FIG. 4 shows a computer print with the predicted positions of the short-PCR

15   fragments in a 2-D gel electrophoresis pattern with the indicated specifications.

FIG. 5 shows the actual gel separation pattern indicating correspondence with the theoretically predicted pattern.

FIG. 6 shows that with the long-PCR product for exons 18-23 as template all 6 of the short PCR fragments are obtained (lanes 7-12), whereas with total genomic DNA as

20   template most products are missing (lanes 1-6). It also shows that only 5 ng total genomic DNA is sufficient as starting material for the long-PCR (lane 13), and that all short PCR products are obtained with the long-PCR products as template (lanes 20-24).

FIG. 7 shows details of wildtype (homozygous normal) fragments and several

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heterozygous mutants.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

5   In summary, in an important aspect, the invention embraces a method of analyzing

predetermined gene exons derived from DNA, that comprises, adding primer pairs to

successive groups of the gene exons followed by effecting polymerase chain reaction

amplifications thereof in a common tube, as a first step and relatively long multiplex

polymerase chain reaction; adding further primer pairs to each of the gene exons and

10   effecting polymerase chain reaction amplifications thereof in the common tube as a

second step and short multiplex polymerase chain reaction; and electrophoretically

separating the gene fragments.

         Preferred and best mode techniques will now be described.

15 DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

         The present invention, as before stated, involves the design of an accurate and

efficient mutation detection test on the basis of a minimal number of two-step multiplex

PCR reactions in combination with automatic two-dimensional separation of the fragments

20   to detect all possible mutations in the gene(s) simultaneously.

         Table 1 lists the different steps in the design of a TDGS test, with the RB

(retinoblastoma) tumor suppressor gene as a model. First, the gene sequences are

retrieved from a database (e.g. Genbank) and the target regions, i.e., exons, splice sites,

regulatory regions, are defined. Then, primers are positioned to obtain all target regions

as the smallest possible number of fragments that can still be amplified through long-

PCR, i.e. up to at least 20 kb (TaKaRa LA PCR Kit. Product Insert). Some general

5 guidelines in choosing primer sequences for long-PCR have been described (Foord and

Rose, 1994, Long-distance PCR, PCR Methods and Applications 3, S149-S161), but

empirical determination of optimal primers remains necessary.

Table 1. Design of a TDGS test.

10 1. Retrieve sequence from database.

2. Position primers for long-PCR to cover all desired regions (e.g., coding sequences,
splice sites, regulatory regions, mutation hotspots) by the smallest possible number
of amplicons.

3. Position primers for short-PCR according to the following criteria:

15
a. the desired target sequences should be covered by amplicons of between 100
and 600 bp

b. amplicons should have optimal melting behaviour, i.e., consist of one lowest-
melting domain in addition to the GC-clamp attached to one of the primers.

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c. optimal amplicon distribution over the 2-D gel

d. similar reaction kinetics

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4. Set up PCR conditions separately for each primer set with the long-PCR products
as template.

5. Develop multiplex co-amplification conditions by grouping primer sets and adjusting
reaction components.

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As listed in Table 1, item 3, then, using the long-PCR fragments as template, primers for short-PCR are selected to yield fragments of between 100 and 600 bp. The main selection criterion here is necessarily the melting behaviour of the fragments. In the ideal situation, each amplicon should comprise only one melting domain, which should

5   be lower (less stable) than the GC-clamp attached to it. Attachment of a 30-40 bp GC-clamp is accomplished by making it part of one of the primers (Sheffield et al., 1989, The sensitivity of single-strand conformation polymorphism analysis for the detection of single base substitutions, Genomics 16, 325-332). Optimal melting behaviour is determined of each candidate target sequence by using a computer program (e.g., MELT87; Lerman

10   and Silverstein, 1987, Computational simulation of DNA melting and its application to denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis, Meth. Enzymol. 155, 482-501). An example of an amplicon with optimized melting behaviour through GC-clamping is shown in Fig. 2, in connection with exon 12 for RB.

In general, a collection of primers is selected that allow an optimal distribution, in

15   both size and DGGE dimension, over the 2-D gel. Due to the high resolution of 2-D gels (5-10-bp size differences are easily resolved) this is generally not too difficult. Indeed, with 50 fragments or less, spot distribution is hardly an issue and primers can simply be selected according to their melting behaviour.

Fig. 3 shows the collection of amplicons selected for the RB gene, together with

20   the long-PCR fragments that served as templates. Together the short-PCR fragments represent more than 90% of the RB coding region.

Figs. 4 and 5 show the theoretical and the empirical spot distribution for the 24

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exons of the RB gene covered by the amplicons shown in Fig. 3. Although there are

differences, most notably the spot representing exon 11, our conclusion is that overall the

melting program accurately predicts spot positions.

It is important to realize that without the first long-PCR step, the optimal melting

5   criterium is usually in conflict with other primer design criteria applied to PCR with total

genomic DNA as template. Indeed, for the RB gene it was found to be impossible to

select conditions suitable for both optimal separation in DGGE and optimal priming in

PCR. The pre-purification step represented by the long-PCR is apparently a conditio sine

qua non for the design of an optimal set of PCR primers in TDGS.

10   When the test format is established, the two-step PCR amplifications are carried

out in a multiplex format. It is the possibility to design and perform multiplex PCR

reactions that represents the core of the present invention. The necessity of the first,

long-PCR step for a successful multiplex PCR is demonstrated by the results shown in

Fig. 6. In Fig. 6, the 6 lanes on the left contain PCR products obtained after performing

15   a multiplex PCR of exons 18-23 (6 fragments) of the RB gene, using different amounts

of total genomic DNA as template. Clearly, virtually no products of the desired lengths are

obtained. The latter is in contrast to lanes 7-12, in which the products were applied of the

same multiplex PCR reaction, but this time with the long-PCR product as template. The

long-PCR was performed at different cycles and it is clear that only 5-10 cycles are

20   needed to generate enough template for a successful multiplex PCR.

Lanes 13 to 19 contain the multiplex short-PCR products obtained with the long-

PCR products as template, at different amounts of starting material, i.e., different amounts

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of total genomic DNA used in the long-PCR reaction. Interestingly, 5 ng total genomic DNA is sufficient to obtain all the products. Since clinical material is sometimes not available in plentiful amounts (e.g., breast cancer needle biopsies) this is an important result, indicating that a successful test can be performed with very small amounts of DNA.

5   Finally, lanes 20-24 of Fig. 6 contain the products of the 5 multiplex PCRs corresponding to the 6 long-PCR sets (long-PCR groups 1 and 6 were combined; see also Fig. 3 and later discussed Table 2). Further adjustments of PCR conditions and/or primers should make it possible to obtain an even smaller number of multiplex sets for this gene. Indeed, there is no reason why the entire RB gene coding region couldn't be

10   amplified in only one single PCR reaction. After the second PCR, the fragments are allowed to undergo one complete round of denaturation/renaturation to facilitate the formation of heteroduplexes. There are presented in Table 2, a listing of the primer pairs for TDGS for the case of RB; the exon numbers being listed in the left most table, with long PCR primer codes for six exon groups (0 through 24-27) and short PCR primers for

15   the individual 27 exons.

       Subsequent to the PCR, the mixture of fragments is subjected to 2-D electrophoresis in a denaturing gradient gel (Fig. 1). The availability of an automated instrument greatly simplifies this process. The instrument used here allows 10 gels at a time to run without manual interference, i.e., cutting out lanes and loading these onto a

20   second gel. All experiments involving optimization of the experimental conditions were carried out using manual instruments. After 2-D electrophoresis the gels are released from between the glass plates and stained with ethidium bromide or any other stain.

Table 2. Primer pairs for TDGS of RB

RB: Long-PCR

exons		primers 5'-3'	size
5	0-2	TGTCAGGCCTGCCTGACAGACTTCTATTCAGCA ATGTTAGCAGAGGTAAATTTCCTCTGGGTAATGG	4.5 kb
	3-6	GCAGTCATTTCCCAACACCTCCCCTCTGT AAGCCAAGCAGAGAATGAGGGAGGAGTACATTAC	9 kb
10	7-11	TCAGCAGTTTCTCCCTCCAAGTCAGAGAGGC GAGACCAGAAGGAGCAAGATCAGGTAGTAG	10 kb
15	12-17	ACCATTCCCCCTACTCTCCATGGTCCATG CTCACAGGAAAAATACACAGTATCCTGTTTGTGTGGC	12.4 kb
	18-23	CCAGCCTTGCATTCTGGGGATGAAGC AGTCGTAAATAGATTTTCTTCACCCCGCCCC	14 kb
20	24-27	GCCTTTGCCCTCCCTAAATATGGGCAATGG CTGGGTTATCAGGACTCCCACTCTAGGGCC	7.3 kb

RB: Short-PCR

	exon	primers 5'-3'	size	Tm(%UF)	multiplex set
25	2	[GC1] TTGATTTATAAGTATATGCCA CAAAACGTTTTAAGAAAATCC	229bp	30	E
	3	[GC1] CCAGTGTGTGAATTATTTAA CCTTTTATGGCAGAGGCTTATA	239bp	27	A
30	4	[GC1] GAATTGAAATATCTATGATT ATCAGAGTGTAACCCTAATA	270bp	24	A
35	5	[GC1] TACTATGACTTCTAAATTACG GTGAAAAATAACATTCTGTG	157bp	27	A
	6	TGGAAAACTTTCTTTCAGTG [GC1] GAATTTAGTCCAAAGGAATGC	237bp	17	A
40	7	[GC1] CCTGCGATTTTCTCTCATAC GCAACTGCTGAATGAGAAAG	257bp	26	B
	8	GTTCTTATCTAATTTACCACT [GC1] TTTTAAAGAAATCATGAAGTT	229bp	27	B
45	9	[GC1] AGTCAAGAGATTAGATTTTG ATCCTCCCTCCACAGTC	227bp	20	B
50	10	[GC1] GACATGTAAAGGATAATTGT GCAAATCAATCAAATATACC	222bp	21	B

11	AGTATGTGAATGACTTCACT [GC1] TATAATATAATTAAAAGTAGG	174bp	21	B
12	CTCCCTTCATTGCTTAACAC [GC1] TTTCTTTGCCAAGATATTAC	211bp	24	C
13	[GC1] GATTACACAGTATCCTCGAC GCAGTACCACGAATTACAATG	224bp	34	C
14	[GC1] GTGATTTTCTAAAATAGCAGG ACCGCGCCCGGCTGAAAT	179bp	35	C
17	[GC1] TTCTTTGTCTGATAATAAC CTCTCACTAACAATAATTTGTT	380bp	26	C
18	[GC1] GACTTTTAAATTGCCACTGT ATTCCCTACAGTTTCTTTAT	393bp	33	D
19	[GC1] CAACTTGAAATGAAGAC CGTCCCGCTGCTCTTGAAAATAATCATC	248bp	34	D
20	[GC1] AAAATGACTAATTTTTCTTATTCCC AGGAGAGAAGGTGAAGTGC	227bp	44	D
21	[GC2] CATTCTGACTACTTTTACATC CGGGCTTACTATGGAAAATTAC	201bp	28	D
22	[GC3] CTTTTTACTGTTCTTCC CCAATCAAAGGATACTTTTG	194bp	33	D
23	[GC1] TCTAATGTAATGGGTCCACC CCCTACTTCCCTAAAGAGAAAAC	281bp	38	D
24	CGGAATGATGTATTTATGCTCA [GC1] TTCTTTTATACTTACAATGC	195bp	22	E
25	[GC1] ATGATTTAAAGTAAAGAATTCT CATCTCAGCTACTGGAAAAC	245bp	38	E
26	[GC1] TCCATTTATAAATACACATG ATTTCGTTTACACAAGGTG	161bp	32	E
27	[GC1] TACCCAGTACCATCAATGC TCCAGAGGTGTACACAGTG	191bp	43	E

GC-clamps:
GC1: CGCCCGCCGCGCCCCGCGCCCGTCCCGCCC (30mer)
GC2: CGCCCCGCGCCGCCGCCCCGCCCCCGCCCGTCCCGCCC (38mer)
GC3: CGCCCCGCCGCGCCCCGCGCGCCCGGTCCCCGCGC (35mer)

The resulting patterns were documented and evaluated (by eye and image
analysis) for the occurrence of mutations. Under the conditions applied
ie, GC-clamping and heteroduplexing, heterozygous mutations result in 4
spots: the 2 homoduplex variants

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and the 2 heteroduplex variants (illustrated in Fig. 7). The latter are not always separated. Since mutations may also occur in a homozygous state it can be necessary to mix each sample before PCR with a control sample to make sure that heteroduplex molecules will be present.

5   The following provides details of the manner in which the embodiments of the present invention may be made and used in order to achieve the accurate and efficient preparation and examination of gene fragments in DNA diagnostic testing. This description, which is focused on an illustrative or model gene, i.e., the tumor suppressor gene RB previously discussed, is not to be construed as specifically limiting the invention.

10   The same procedure may be used on other genes and/or to combine even more PCR fragments in the same tube, within the purview of one skilled in the art, and are to be considered to fall within the scope of this invention.

A. Design of the RB Two-Step PCR TDGS Test

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        Sequence Retrieval. The sequence of the RB gene is retrieved from a database, i.e., Genbank. The target regions, i.e., exons, splice sites, regulatory regions are defined.

        Primer Selection for multiplex Long-PCR. Primer pairs for long-PCR are positioned

20   in such a way as to cover all target regions by the smallest possible number of fragments that can still be amplified through long-PCR. Long-PCR primers are also selected for highest specificity, optimal annealing temperature and minimal self-complementation for

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multiplex long-PCR, e.g., by using primer design software. The design of the long-PCR multiplex is relatively easy in view of the ample positioning space of the primers.

Primer Selection for Multiplex Short-PCR. Primer pairs for short-PCR are selected

5   on the basis of the following criteria:

a.   the desired target sequences should be covered by amplicons of between 100 and 600 bp

10   b.   amplicons should have optimal melting behaviour, i.e., consist of one lowest-melting domain in addition to the GC-clamp attached to one of the primers.

c.   optimal amplicon distribution over the 2-D gel

15   d.   similar reaction kinetics

Criterion b, above, is frequently in conflict with standard primer design criteria, if applied on total genomic DNA. Indeed, the present invention proved to be both necessary and sufficient for the design and performance of TDGS as a rapid, accurate and practical

20   tool for mutation detection in the RB gene.

Multiplex groups are selected empirically on the basis of the behaviour of the primers in various multiplex reactions. For RB multiplex groups were made according to

20

the long-PCR. That is, all short PCRs with one long-PCR fragment as template were
amplified together as one multiplex group. Two long-PCR groups were actually combined
as one multiplex group. All short-PCR fragment may also be amplified together. As before
explained, Table 2 lists the primer pairs used for the long and short PCRs, fragment

5   sizes, annealing temperatures, melting temperatures and the five different multiplex
groups.

B. PCR Reactions and Heteroduplexing

10   Primers (deprotected and desalted) can be obtained from various sources. Our
primers were obtained from Gibco BRL. For long-term storage, primers should be kept,
for example in a stock solution of 100 μM in ultrapure water, at -20 °C. For short-term
use, we kept them at -20 °C as a solution of 12.5 μM in ultrapure water.

We carried out our PCR reactions in thermowell tubes (Costar, Cambridge, MA)

15   in a GeneE thermocycler (Techne, Cambridge, UK) fitted with a Heated Lid, removing the
need for an oil overlay on the samples. Multiplex long PCR reactions (6 fragments) were
carried out in a 100 μl volume with 5-500 ng genomic DNA as template and 0.2 μM of
each primer, using the LA PCR kit (TaKaRa). PCR reactions are performed according to
the manufacturer's instructions. The conditions were as follows. First, one cycle of 94 °C,

20   1 min, followed by 30 cycles of 98 °C, 20 sec / 68 °C, 12 min with 10 s increment per
cycle, and finally one cycle of 72 °C, 12 min. The PCR products are stored at -20 °C for
further use.

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Short PCR reactions are carried out, using the same GeneE thermocycler, in a 50 µl volume with 2 µl long-PCR product, 0.2-0.5 µM of each primer, 0.25 mM dNTPs, 2.5-4.5 mM $MgCl_2$, 3 units of Taq polymerase (Gibco BRL or Promega). The PCR conditions are as follows. One cycle of 94 °C, 2 min, then 30 cycles of 94 °C, 40 sec / 41 °C, 40 sec
5   / 69 °C, 2 min (with a 2-sec increment increase per cycle) and finally one cycle of 72 °C, 10 min.

After the short PCR, fragments are heteroduplexed by one complete round of denaturation/renaturation. That is, 98°C, 10 min / 55 °C, 30 min / 41 °C, 30 min.

After PCR and heteroduplexing the contents of the tubes are mixed and 1/10
10   volume of loading buffer is added. Based on ethidium bromide staining, there is usually enough sample for several runs. When the total volume is too large for the slot capacity, the sample (prior to adding loading buffer) has to be ethanol-precipitated and re-dissolved in a smaller volume.

15   C. Two-Dimensional Electrophoresis.

Instruments for both manual and automatic 2-D electrophoresis were from the before mentioned Ingeny B.V. (Leiden, The Netherlands). For manual electrophoresis, the mixtures of DNA fragments were first subjected to size separation using a 0.75 mm thick
20   9% PAA gel at 45 °C for 5-6 h. The separation pattern was visualized by ethidium bromide staining for 10 min and UV transillumination of the gel, which lies on a glass plate to protect the DNA fragments from damage by the UV light. The 100 to 600 bp

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region in the middle part of the lane (so not including the edges) was quickly cut out and applied to a 1-mm thick 9% PAA gel containing a 0-60% (RB) or 30-90% (p53) urea/formamide (UF) gradient. Gradients were poured using a simple gradient former (Gibco BRL). Electrophoresis was for 7.5 - 11 h at 60 °C and 200 V. After electrophoresis

5   the gels were stained with 0.5 µg/ml ethidium bromide for 15-20 min and destained in water for another 15 min. The patterns were documented under UV illumination using a polaroid camera.

For automatic 2-D electrophoresis, gels were poured, ten at a time, in the gel-casting device that comes with the automated 2-D electrophoresis instrument according

10 to the manufacturer's instructions (Ingeny B.V., Leiden, The Netherlands). After polymerization the gels (between glass plates) are removed from the gel-casting box and cleaned with a wet tissue. They are then placed in the instrument according to the manufacturer's instructions, that is, in two gel-holding cassettes with silicone-side sealings. The instrument containing buffer heated to 45°C is put in the 1-D mode with the

15 power switched off. After adding loading buffer, samples (up to 40 µl) are loaded in the V-shaped wells of the gels in the automated 2-D electrophoresis instrument. Gels of 9% acrylamide, 0.25 % TAE were used with a gradient of 0-60% urea/formamide. The first dimension is run at 180 V for 4 h at 45°C. The second dimension was run at 200 V for 7.5 - 11 h at 60 °C. After electrophoresis the gels were stained with ethidium bromide and

20 the patterns documented under UV illumination as described for the manual instruments.

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In summary, while the present invention is described in connection with two-step (long and short) multiplex polymerase chain reaction amplifications followed by two-dimensional electrophoretic separation, such is also useful with one-dimensional electrophoresis or with other methods for mutation detection that require PCR-amplified

5   target sequences.

Further modifications will also occur to those skilled in this art and such are considered to fall within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined in the appended claims.

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CLAIMS

1. A method of analyzing predetermined gene exons derived from DNA, that comprises, adding primer pairs to successive groups of the gene exons followed by effecting polymerase chain reaction amplifications thereof in a common tube, as a first step and relatively long multiplex polymerase chain reaction; adding further primer pairs

5   to each of the gene exons and effecting polymerase chain reaction amplifications thereof in the common tube as a second step and short multiplex polymerase chain reaction; and electrophoretically separating the gene fragments.

2. A method as claimed in claim 1 and in which the gene fragments are electrophoretically separated on the basis of size along one dimension.

10   3. A method as claimed in claim 2 and in which the gene fragments are further subjected to further electrophoretic base pair sequence separation along an orthogonal dimension and along a temperature or chemical denaturing gradient to distribute the gene fragments at particular sequence locations along the orthogonal dimension; and comparing such locations with those of normal gene fragments to detect genetic

15   mutations.

4. A method as claimed in claim 3 and in which the primers are oligonucleotide primers labelled with fluorescent dyes.

5. A method as claimed in claim 3 and in which the nucleotide building blocks used in the polymerase chain reaction are fluorescently labelled.

20   6. A method as claimed in claim 3 and in which the electrophoretic separation is effected in a denaturing gradient gel.

7. A method as claimed in claim 6 and in which a gradient of urea and formamide is applied in a gel to separate the fragments.

8. A method as claimed in claim 6 and in which a temperature gradient is applied in a gel to separate the fragments.

9. A method as claimed in claim 3 and in which, for the retinoblastoma gene, the long-PCR gene exon groups are exons 1-2, 3-6, 7-11, 12-17, 18-23 and 24-27.

10. A method of analyzing predetermined gene exons derived from DNA, that comprises, adding primer pairs to successive groups of the gene exons followed by effecting polymerase chain reaction amplifications thereof in a common tube, as a first step and relatively long multiplex polymerase chain reaction; and adding further primer pairs to each of the gene exons and effecting polymerase chain reaction amplifications thereof in the common tube as a second step and short multiplex polymerase chain reaction.
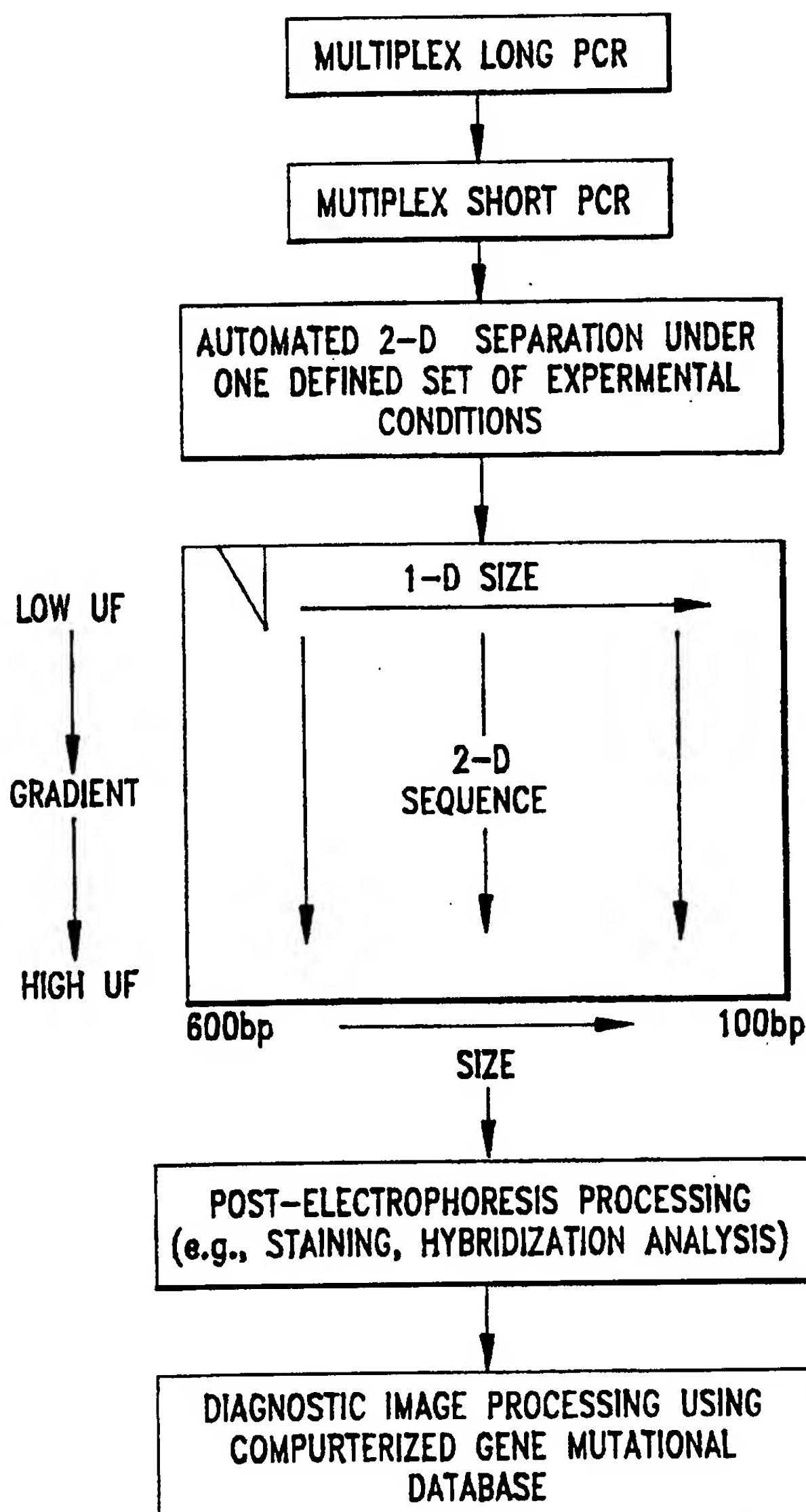
FIG. 1

MELTING CURVE OF EXON 12(Rb)
WITH 3' GC-CLAMP
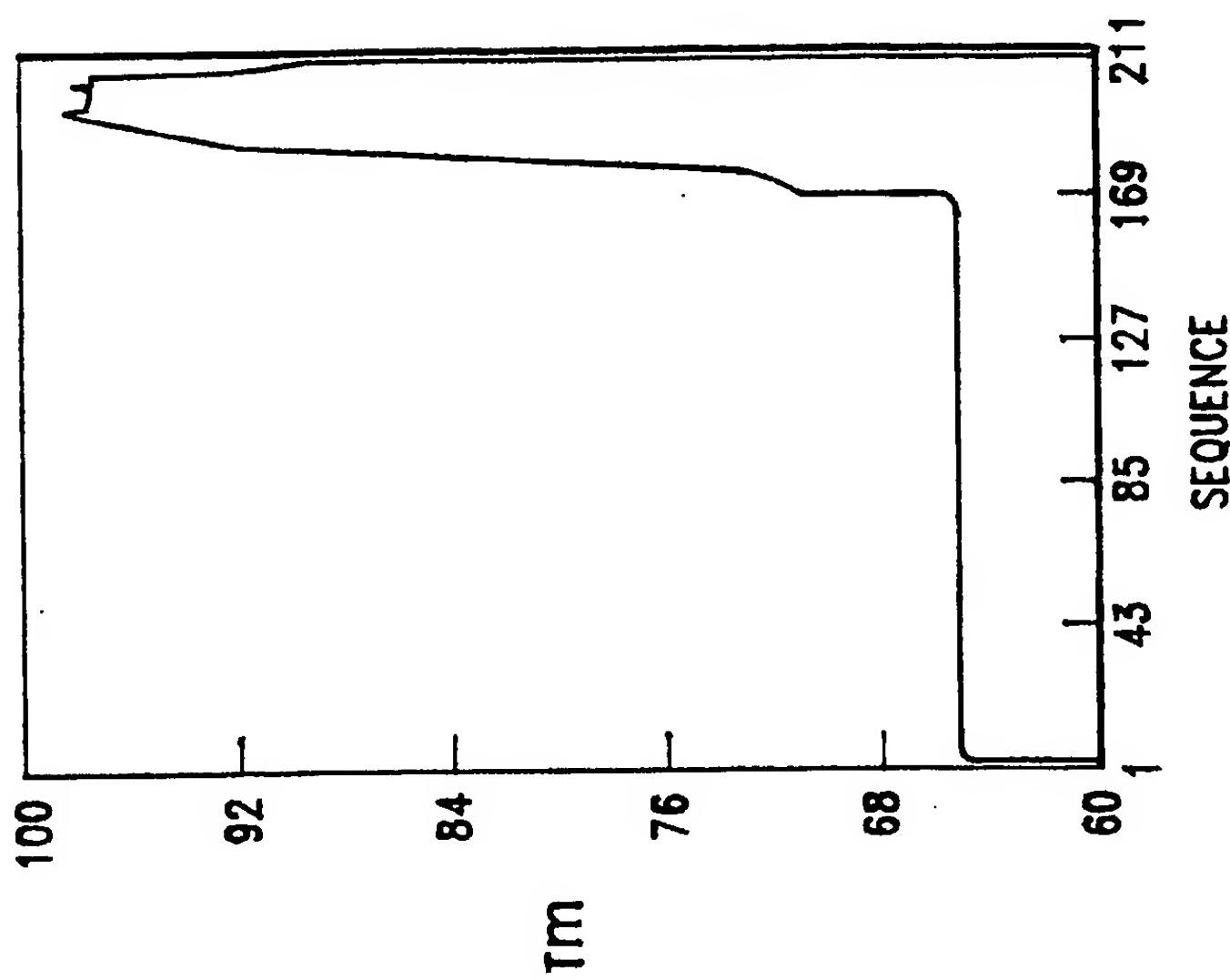
FIG. 2B

MELTING CURVE OF EXON 12(Rb)
NO GC-CLAMP
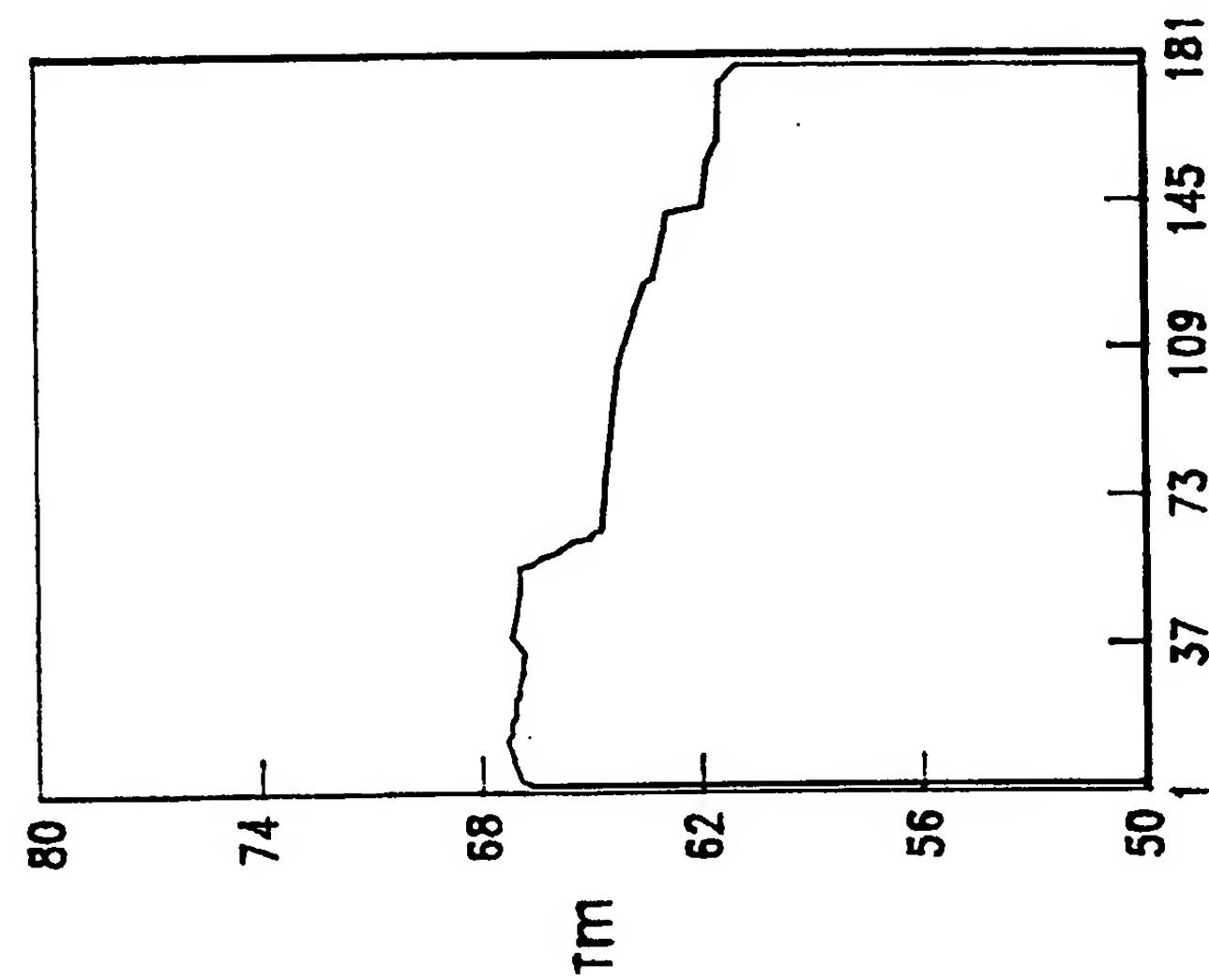
FIG. 2A
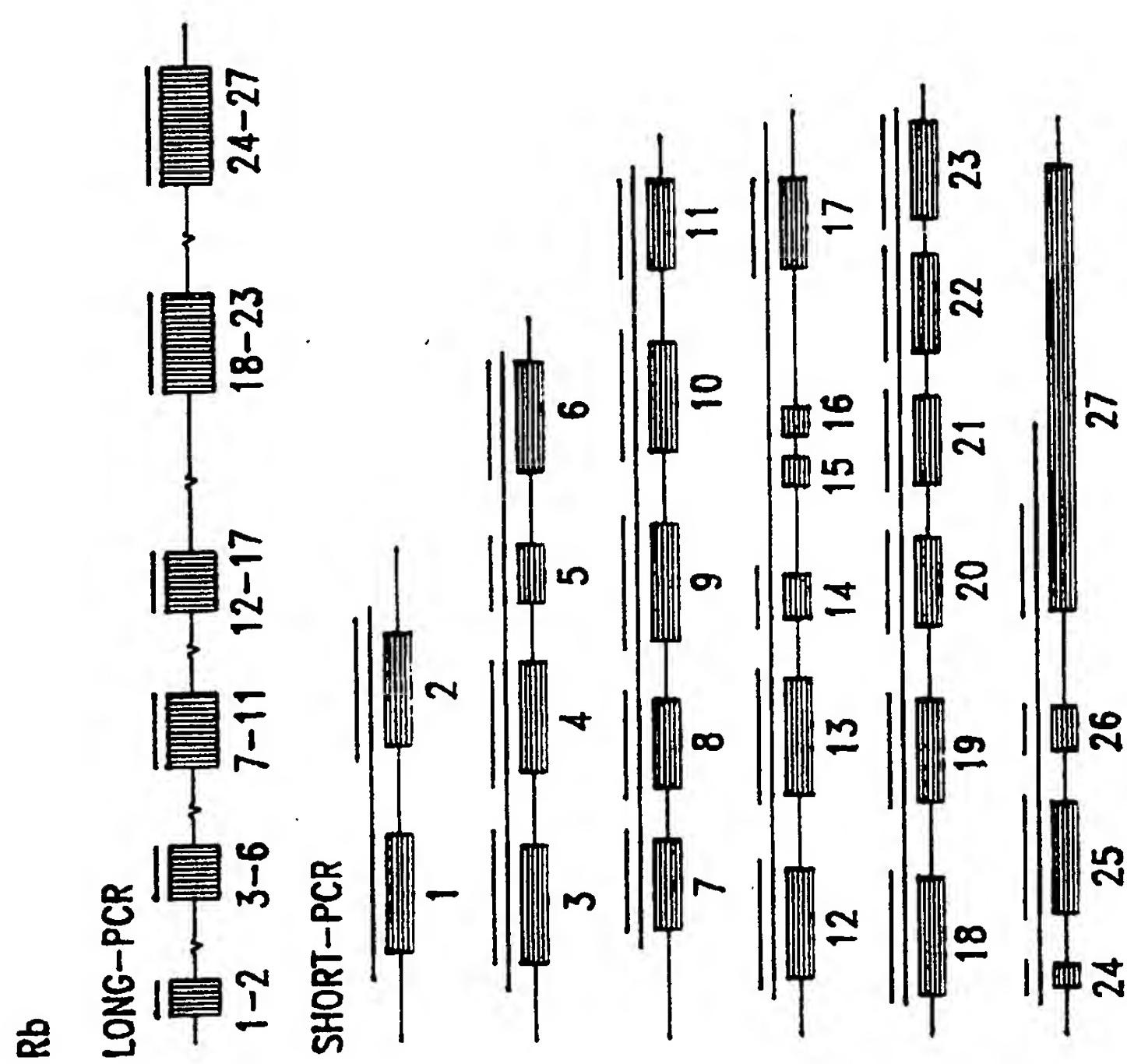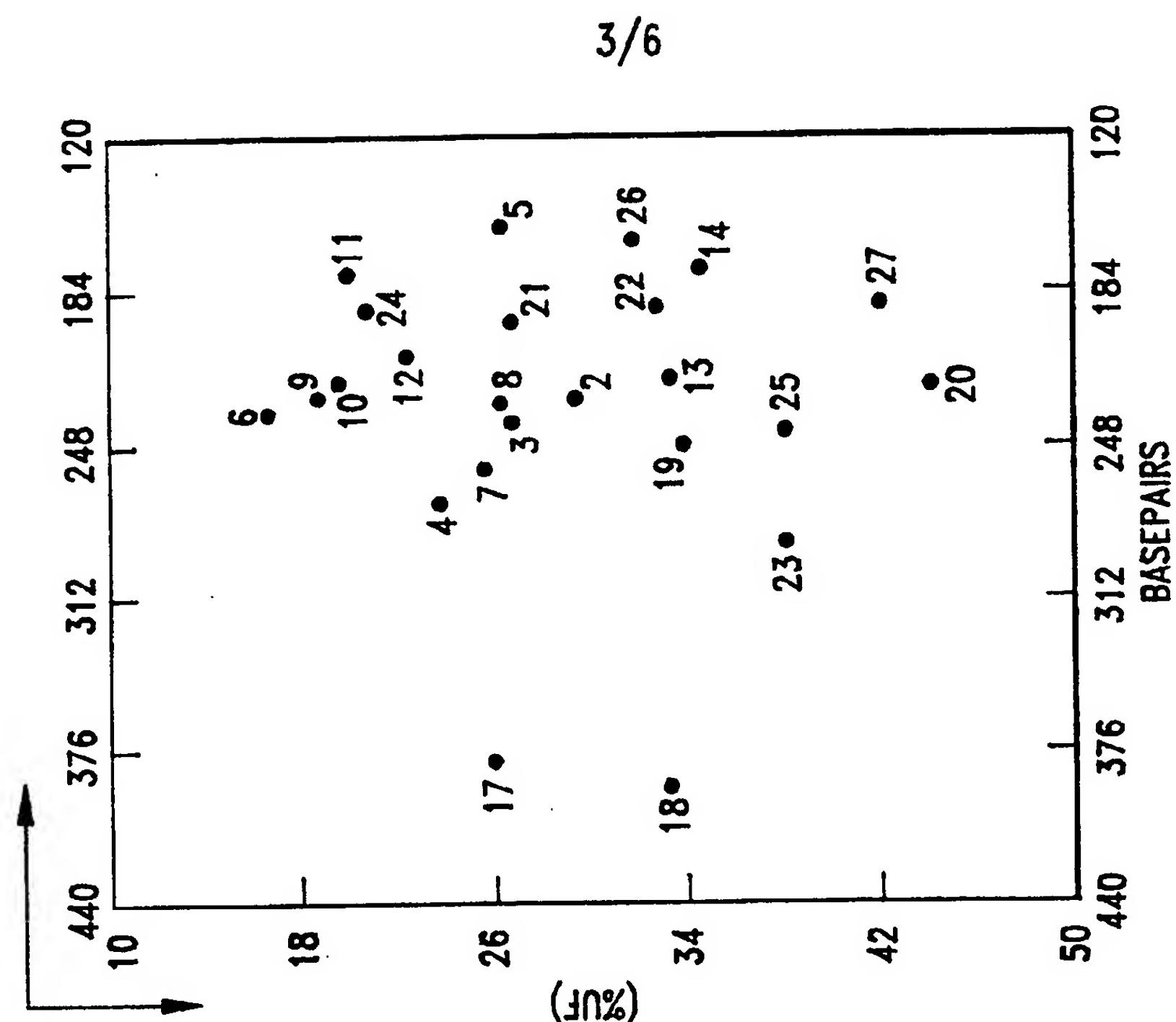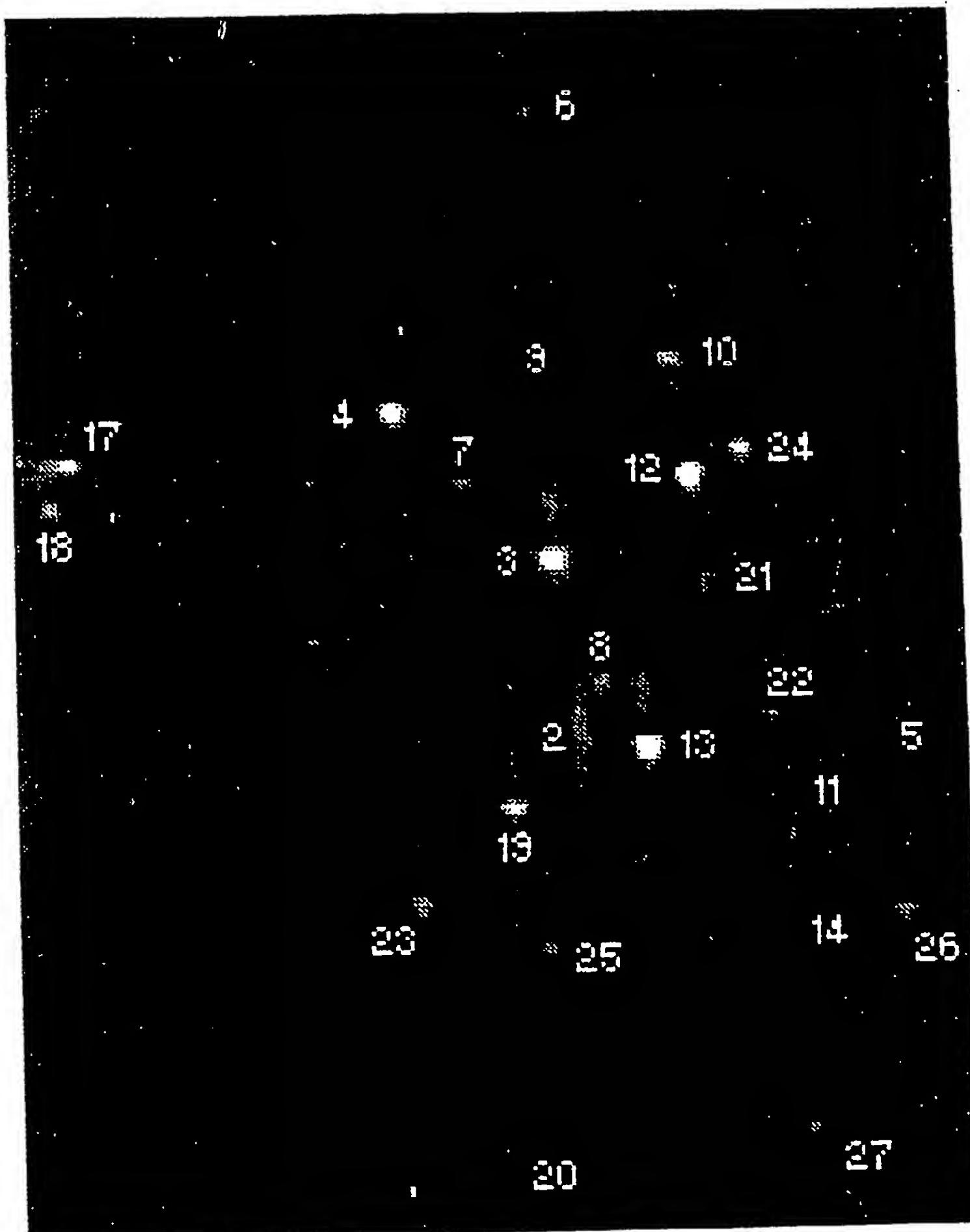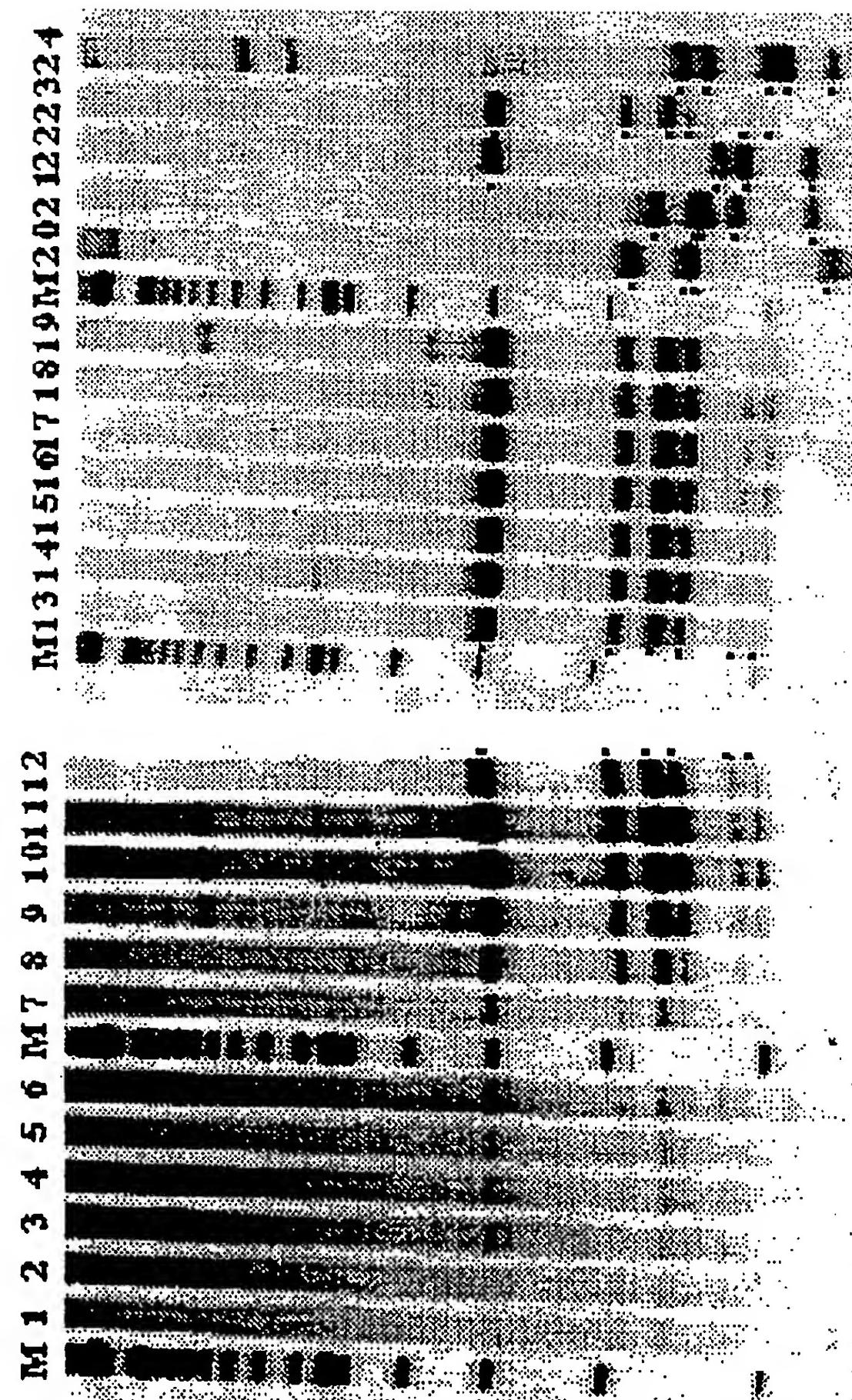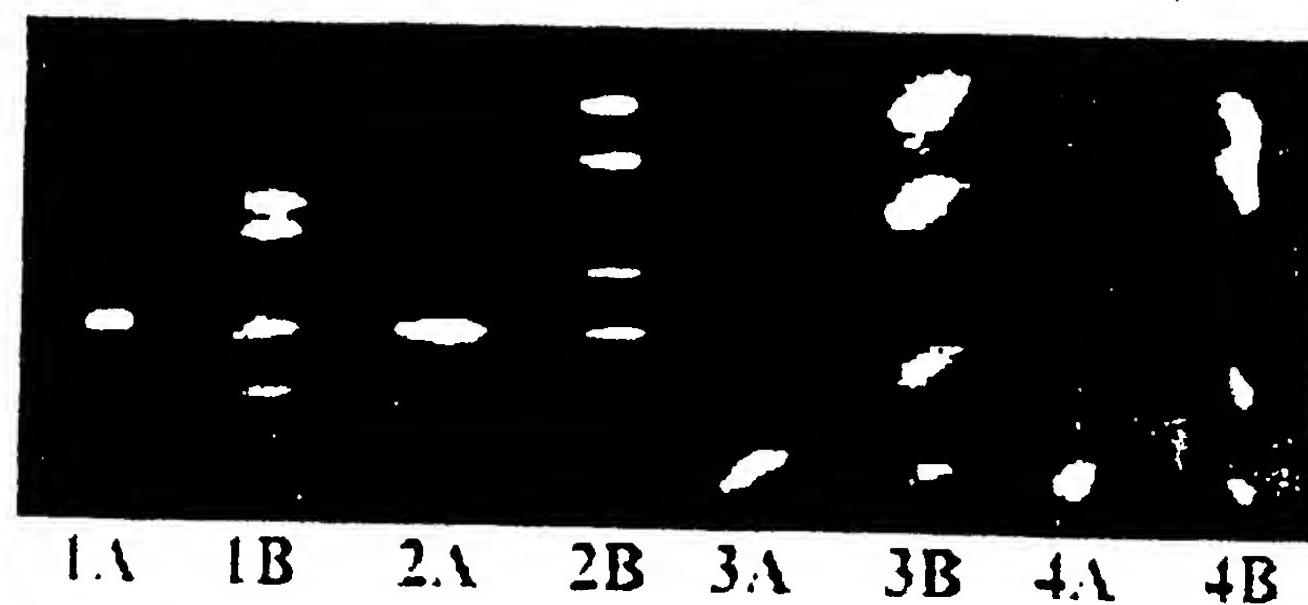
FIG. 4

FIG. 3

FIG. 5

FIG. 6

FIG. 7

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 6 C12Q1/68   C12P19/34

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 6 C12Q

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	EP,A,0 364 255 (BAYLOR COLLEGE OF MEDICINE) 18 April 1990 see the whole document ---	1-10
A	BIOTECHNOLOGY, vol. 13, no. 2, February 1995, pages 137-9, XP000604764 VIJG, J.: "Detecting individual genetic variation" see the whole document ---	2-8
T	NUCLEIC ACIDS RESEARCH, vol. 24, no. 3, 1 February 1996, pages 538-39, XP002014622 LI, D ET AL: "multiplex co-amplification of 24 retinoblastoma gene exons after pre-amplification by long-distance PCR" see the whole document ---	1-10

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[X] Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C. [X] Patent family members are listed in annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
27 September 1996	18.10.96

Name and mailing address of the ISA	Authorized officer
European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	Osborne, H

Form PCT/ISA/210 (second sheet) (July 1992)

Inte   onal Application No

PCT/IB 96/00543

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	EP,A,0 469 610 (SHIONOGI SEIYAKU KABUSHIKI KAISHA) 5 February 1992 see the whole document ---	1,10
A	WO,A,92 13101 (INGENY B.V.) 6 August 1992 see the whole document -----	1-10

2

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

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EP-A-364255	18-04-90	AU-A-	3862193	12-08-93
		AU-B-	634175	18-02-93
		AU-A-	4260589	26-04-90
		JP-A-	7136000	30-05-95
EP-A-469610	05-02-92	JP-A-	4091790	25-03-92
WO-A-9213101	06-08-92	NL-A-	9100132	17-08-92
		EP-A-	0559841	15-09-93